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Government
Publications

A Report on the Role of School Councils



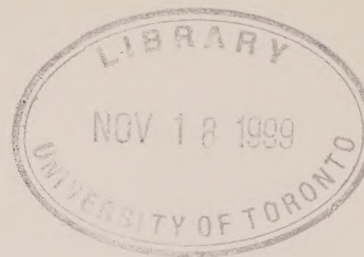
Education
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The Road Ahead—III
November 1998

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LETTER of Transmittal

November 19, 1998

Dear Minister,

The Education Improvement Commission is pleased to present its third report, *The Road Ahead – III: A Report on the Role of School Councils*.

The recommendations in this report are tied to the education reforms and recommendations set out in our previous reports. They are meant to inform the development of regulations and policy directives of the Ministry of Education and Training that deal with school councils and parental involvement in education, as well as the policies of school boards, schools, school councils, and other partners in Ontario's education systems.

Since the Commission was established in April 1997, parents and other members of the public have demonstrated to us that they have a high level of interest in this topic. They have shared their views and sought our opinions, expressing a strong desire for clarification of the role of school councils.

In our formal preparations for this report, we reviewed school councils in Ontario and other jurisdictions, as well as current Canadian and

international research on the role of school councils. We also issued a discussion paper, *The Future Role of School Councils*, which contained six questions designed to frame our consultations with the public and members of the education community on this topic:

- How can parents, communities, and school councils best contribute to a child's education?
- What should school councils be doing?
- How can school councils ensure that they represent their communities?
- What should be the relationships among the school council, the staff, the principal, the district school board, and the community?
- What kinds of support do school councils need?
- What makes an effective school council?

We received over 1,800 written responses to our discussion paper, reflecting the views of approximately 16,000 people. We met with provincial associations that have an interest in this topic and held public consultations in 22 communities,

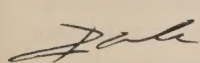
in which over 2,000 people participated. In addition, we received public input at speaking engagements and meetings, and from on-line chat groups, letters, and phone calls. Throughout, it was clear that the vast majority of people who shared their views with us were parents of children in Ontario's schools. School councils are an important opportunity for them to participate in their children's education, and they have shown how much they care.

The strong interest in this topic shown by Ontarians affirms our own enthusiasm for, and the government's commitment to, parental involvement in education.

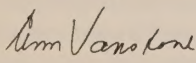
While this report is based on what we heard parents and others say, our recommendations and our responses to members of the public throughout the consultation process have also been guided by our personal experience with and knowledge of Ontario's education systems.

We commend this report to you and look forward to continuing to work with you.

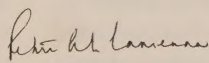
Sincerely,



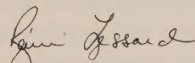
Dave Cooke
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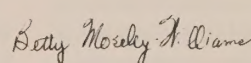
Ann Vanstone
Co-chair



Peter Cameron
Commissioner



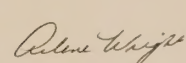
Rémi Lessard
Commissioner



Betty Moseley-Williams
Commissioner



Mearl Obee
Commissioner



Arlene Wright
Commissioner

1. INTRODUCTION



A school council should be a relationship forged through common goals, with the focus on the betterment of the child's education.

– **School council chair, Southwestern Ontario**

Our purpose in this report is to identify a meaningful role for school councils, one that encourages and facilitates the involvement of parents in their children's education.

In its December 1994 report, *For the Love of Learning*, the Royal Commission on Learning recommended the establishment of “school-community” councils. Our consultations and dialogue with the people of Ontario have convinced us that the level of parental and community involvement in education has increased over the past few years. Our commitment to an influential role for parents and other community members in the education of Ontario's children has been strengthened. We are convinced that school councils can play a particularly important role in focusing the province's education systems on students.

This is our third major report, and it continues the process we have undertaken of clarifying a vision of education for Ontario. Our discussions with Ontarians over the last year and a half have confirmed our belief that they want:

- an education system that focuses on students;
- an understanding of how the various education reforms relate to one another;

- a vision of where education is heading; and
- a road map of how to get there.

The recommendations in this report are based on what we learned during an extensive research and consultation process. (The appendices and bibliography contain more information about that process.) We wish to thank everyone who responded to the discussion paper, made submissions on the subject, and attended our consultation sessions. Your comments were important and valuable.

Like our earlier reports, this one strives to provide a vision and a road map—in this case, one that will guide the Ministry of Education and Training and Ontario's district school boards, principals, school councils, and parents in the development and implementation of school councils that have a worthwhile and substantive role to play in the education of our children. The model of school councils that we suggest through our recommendations is not intended to be set in stone. The activities and operations of councils are evolving and will continue to evolve.

This document is a report to the Minister of Education and Training containing recommendations about school councils. It is *not* a policy directive. The

Ministry of Education and Training's Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM) No. 122, *School Board Policies on School Councils*, sets out the mandate of school councils and the minimum requirements for their composition and operation. PPM 122 remains in force until it is revoked.

PPM 122 provides good direction, but it became apparent to us that too few members of the education community know or understand its content. Many of the frustrations experienced by school councils stem from this lack of understanding. PPM 122 is reproduced in appendix B of this report, and we urge readers to review it. Despite its considerable merits, however, PPM 122 lacks the accountability measures that would ensure its policy directives are followed. In addition, many of those who participated in our consultation requested that aspects of the memorandum be clarified, particularly the section on the roles and responsibilities of school councils. Our recommendations address these issues.

No policy directive, however, will replace a common will to make school councils succeed. In the end, it is parents, students, school council members, principals, school employees, board administrators, and trustees, working in a collaborative and supportive manner, who will make school councils work.

2. THE CONTEXT of School Councils

Education in Ontario is a partnership of the province, school boards, and school communities. Education reforms have shifted some of the responsibilities, but each partner still has an important role to play. To be effective, the partners must collaborate. To understand the role of school councils, and to consider changes to that role, it is necessary to understand the responsibilities of each partner.

The Provincial Level

The Ministry of Education and Training is responsible for establishing what students must know at each grade level and upon graduation. The ministry is in the process of establishing a uniform province-wide curriculum, bringing greater consistency to the programmes offered in elementary and secondary schools. The ministry is also responsible for providing equitable funding to district school boards so that expectations for students can be achieved, and for establishing the accountability measures that will ensure expectations are achieved.

The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) and the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) also have important provincial-level responsibilities: the EQAO for monitoring and assessing student achievement and other indicators of the effectiveness of education in

Ontario, and the OCT for teacher certification, teachers' professional development, and teaching standards.

Together, these bodies determine and monitor the consistency that Ontarians demand from their education systems.

The School Board Level

Boards of trustees establish the overall policy direction for their schools. They are responsible for ensuring that the standards established by the ministry are achieved by students in their jurisdictions. They are also employers who are responsible for employing sufficient and capable staff, and for providing appropriate compensation and a fair and just work environment.

In the past year, Ontario's school boards have undergone considerable change in a massive amalgamation exercise. Some boards are newly created. All have had to rethink past practices. Two important considerations are the considerably larger geographical areas for which most boards are responsible, and the reduction in the number of trustees. Another catalyst for change, one that has affected all trustees and educators, is the increased public demand in recent years for accountability and the consequent refocusing of education resources on the classroom.

During our consultations on school councils, we were asked if the role of school boards is diminishing. We responded by saying, as we have said in our earlier reports, that we support a strong, continuing role for boards. Boards of trustees are democratically elected and ensure equity of programme and service to students throughout a district. *School councils cannot replace school boards.*

The School Community Level

School principals and staff are responsible for planning and delivering programmes that will enable their students to meet or exceed acceptable levels of achievement. While operating within ministry and board policies, schools reflect and respond to the culture and priorities of their local communities. These communities are often diverse. When the phrase "school community" is used in this report, the idea of diverse "communities" is implicit.

While the primary responsibility of schools is to deliver effective programmes, education reforms have had a significant impact on the way principals, teachers, and other school staff carry out their roles. Many school boards have increased the authority of schools in their jurisdictions to make decisions, within board policy, about programme delivery, school organization, and school budget setting. In addition, principals are expected to work in



School boards and school councils are two educational partners that can mutually support and reinforce one another in ways that are beneficial to both.

– **Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association**



Our school council works well because we have a great principal.

– **Parent,
Northeastern
Ontario**

Parents are the most vital and influential teachers of their own children.

– **Ontario English
Catholic Teachers'
Association**

consultation with their staffs, parents, students, and communities in reaching decisions. School councils have a vital role to play as partners in this collaboration.

Table 1 provides a detailed outline of the current responsibilities of the provincial, board, and school community levels. This table also appeared in our previous report, *The Road Ahead – II: A Report on the Role of School Boards and Trustees*. Following the table, we discuss the composition and operation of school councils.

The Current Role of School Councils

The Education Act requires school boards to “establish a school council for each school operated by the board” (section 170 (1), paragraph 17.1). School councils are advisory bodies: they may provide advice to the principal and, where appropriate, to the school board. They are composed of parents, who form the majority, as well as the principal, a teacher, a non-teaching staff member, a student (mandatory at the secondary level, optional at the elementary level), and community representatives.

Parent, student, and staff members are elected by the groups they represent. Community members are appointed by the council. As representatives of a school’s community, councils provide a forum for discussion about, and a valuable source of advice on, issues that affect their schools.

Ministry of Education and Training Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM) No. 122, dated April 12, 1995, *School Board Policies on School Councils*, sets out the mandate of school councils and the minimum requirements for their composition and operation. (See appendix B for the full text of PPM 122.)

The Minister’s memo that accompanied PPM 122 called for a review of the policy after three years. Given the magnitude of the changes that have occurred in education in Ontario, the review is particularly timely.

Some school councils in Ontario are still in their infancy, while others are already significant partners in education. In many communities, the evolution of school councils has been guided by sound board policies, supportive administrators, and training programmes. In others, their development has been hampered by a lack of clarity about their mandate and limited co-operation from school and board administrators and trustees. During our consultations, we observed that, since boards were amalgamated in January 1998, harmonization of policies has diminished the level of parental involvement in some boards.

Our recommendations are aimed at ensuring that *all* parents and school councils in Ontario become effective collaborators in the education process.

Parental Involvement in Education

Parental involvement in schools has a long and distinguished history. For many years, parents have participated in their children’s education through home and school associations, parent-teacher associations, and other parent groups. We applaud the valuable work of these groups.

But parental involvement in education does not necessarily mean participation in a formal organization. Parents play the first and most important role in their children’s education. By helping with homework, asking about the day’s events, and expressing interest, care, and guidance, parents are the primary factors in their child’s success. Parents, students, and other community members also contribute to and enhance classroom learning by acting as mentors, classroom and library helpers, and fundraisers.

The roles described above are critically important to the success of students and schools. Our recommendations urge school councils to take a strong leadership role in encouraging and facilitating parental and community involvement in schools.

Table 1: Education Accountability Framework

	Who ...	Does What ...	Accountable to ...	For ...
At the provincial level	Ministry of Education and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> articulates vision of education for Ontario sets province-wide direction, including what students will know at each grade level provides sufficient and equitable funding to school boards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the people of Ontario 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> excellence in student achievement effective and efficient use of public funding allocated for education
	Education Quality and Accountability Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> measures and communicates the achievements of students, schools, and school boards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the people of Ontario through its board of directors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> effective monitoring and reporting of student achievement and indicators
	Ontario College of Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> establishes and implements standards for certification, teaching practice, and professional development accredits faculties of education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the people of Ontario, through its governing council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensuring excellence in the teaching profession in Ontario
At the school board level	Trustees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> articulate board's vision for education develop policies based on vision and provincial policy set budgets and goals; monitor policy and student achievement provide equity of programme for students throughout board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the people of their community the people of Ontario (through the Ministry of Education and Training) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> excellence in student achievement effective and efficient use of allocated funding
	Directors of education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> implement board policies hold schools accountable for the achievement of students provide support and direction to schools manage school board organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the board of trustees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> achievement of goals set by board and ministry
At the local school level	School principals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> act as instructional leaders lead and manage schools ensure effective programmes are in place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the director of education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> academic achievements of their students implementing board policies in their school
	School councils (at present)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> advise their school principal and, if requested, their school board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> local school community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> advice that reflects community

3. THE FUTURE

Role of School Councils



Parents have a right to speak out and be informed.

– School council member,
Southern Ontario

Guiding Principles

The following principles guided our discussions on the future role of school councils:

Put students first.

All education reform must focus on what is best for students. Changes in education are driven primarily by the demand for excellence and accountability at all levels of the education system. Given this principle, we asked, how can school councils best contribute to student learning? How can they be an effective part of the accountability framework?

Parents and members of the school community are entitled to open communication with school and board staff, participation in their children's school, and an opportunity to influence decisions that affect their children's education.

The public education systems belong and are accountable to all members of the community. Parents and community members have a right to know how well their school is doing and what actions will be taken to improve student performance, to contribute to the school's development and improvement, and to be consulted about and receive feedback on decisions that affect their children and their school.

Parents are a valuable resource.

Parents know their children best. As noted earlier, they are their children's first and most important teachers. They are also excellent sources of information about the local community, its resources, priorities, and needs.

Education in Ontario is a partnership of the province, district school boards, parents, and local school communities.

This partnership is essential, given, on the one hand, the need for consistent province-wide standards and, on the other hand, Ontario's size and diversity. Education reforms have shifted responsibilities, but each partner continues to have important roles to play.

Catholic and French Ontarians have constitutional and Charter rights that must be honoured in any education reforms undertaken in this province.

Section 93 of the *Constitution Act, 1867*, guarantees Ontario's Catholics the right to govern their own education. Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms provides a similar guarantee to French-language rights holders in Ontario. The province recognizes these rights by providing for four distinct, publicly funded school board systems: English-language,

English-language Catholic, French-language, and French-language Catholic. In considering the role of school councils and making our recommendations, we also recognize these rights. Members of school councils must carry out their responsibilities in accordance with the constitutional and Charter rights of the publicly funded system in which they serve.

Meeting the Needs of Parents

We strongly believe that a high level of parental involvement in education will benefit students and the entire education system. Our discussions with parents across the province indicate that, to play an effective role, they need certain basic information about their child's education. We believe they are *entitled* to this information and to opportunities to influence their child's educational progress.

RECOMMENDATION 1: That the Ministry of Education and Training develop a bill of parents' rights that consolidates the parents' rights already set out in legislation, and adds, as a minimum, the rights to:

- accurate, detailed, and timely information about their child's progress;
- thorough information about the performance of their local school;
- information about how they can support their child's educational progress; and

- opportunities to provide input into their child's educational programme.

Purpose of School Councils

Research indicates that school councils are more effective if they are given a mandate that is *clear* and *meaningful*.¹ Many school councils in the province have been hampered by a lack of clarity about their purpose.

As we asked in our discussion paper, what *should* school councils be doing? What is their ultimate purpose? The answer to these fundamental questions affects everything else that we may recommend about the mandate, composition, and operation of councils.

The background statement of PPM 122 indicates that school councils were established to increase the level of parental and community involvement in the education of Ontario's young people. But is this their *purpose*? Given that the focus of education reform is to improve programmes and increase accountability for student achievement, **we believe that the purpose of school councils is to improve student learning, and that parental and community involvement is one of the means of achieving this purpose.**

RECOMMENDATION 2: That the Ministry of Education and Training state that the purpose of school councils is to improve student learning.

Influence of School Councils

How can school councils influence student learning—that is, the level of student performance and achievement? How can they carry out their role most effectively?

Research on the effectiveness of school councils in Ontario and elsewhere suggests that, to date, their impact has fallen short of the expectations set for them.² However, school councils are relatively new bodies in almost all jurisdictions. Moreover, while a growing number of jurisdictions are encouraging their school councils to focus on student learning, the councils were not always set up for that purpose. Most were established for other reasons, including reducing costs and streamlining governance structures. Therefore, research studies were not designed to assess their effectiveness in influencing student learning.

Our consultations and the responses to our discussion paper indicate that Ontario's experience is mixed. In many places in the province, school councils run smoothly and influence the delivery of education in their schools. In others, council members expressed frustration with the differing views of their role held among themselves, and by administrators, trustees, and the Ministry of Education and Training.

Much discussion has focused on whether councils should be advisory in nature or whether they should have decision-making powers.

Most of our respondents do not want decision-making authority. They equate it with governance or management decisions made by principals, supervisory officers, and directors of education—ordering classroom supplies, hiring and firing, negotiating contracts with employees. They do not wish to take on these responsibilities, nor do we believe they should.

But they also expressed frustration with the current advisory role of councils, feeling that school and board administrators do not listen to their advice. They want councils' advice to influence decisions made at the school and board levels.

We believe the terms "advisory" and "decision-making" have clouded the issue.

Our consultations have convinced us that parents and other members of school councils want to have *meaningful* input into decisions. They want to be able to *influence* decisions that will have an impact on their children and their local school. We support this role and function for school councils.

Many boards and principals now encourage and support a high level of input from their school councils and parents. Others do not. Some actively avoid seeking advice. We believe all school councils and parents deserve to be consulted—by their local schools, their boards, and the Ministry of Education and Training—about key decisions that will have a direct impact



School councils are a structured setting for schools and parents to work together to improve the quality of education.

– School council member,
Eastern Ontario



I hear over and over again that parents do not want to manage their schools or the board. They simply want to contribute in order to enrich the lives of their children.

– Trustee,
Southwestern
Ontario

on the education of their children. Later in this report, we outline specific areas on which we think the ministry, boards, and principals should consult school councils.

RECOMMENDATION 3: That the Ministry of Education and Training change its procedures so as to integrate school councils into its policy development and implementation process for those issues that fall within the responsibilities of school councils; and that the new procedures include adequate timelines for consultation, as well as feedback to school councils on decisions made and rationales for decisions made.

RECOMMENDATION 4: That school boards and principals change their procedures so as to integrate school councils into their policy development and implementation processes for those issues that fall within the responsibilities of school councils; and that the new procedures include adequate timelines for consultation, as well as feedback to school councils on decisions made and rationales for decisions made.

Within ministry and board policies, school councils have considerable flexibility and authority. We recommend that, for the purposes of clarification, these areas be specified.

RECOMMENDATION 5: That the Ministry of Education and Training clarify that school councils are responsible for:

- electing a chair of their council from among their members who are parents;
- appointing community members to their council;
- establishing their bylaws and operating procedures (how to conduct meetings, etc.);
- determining the content and methods of their communications;
- determining how to spend the funds allocated to them to cover the cost of their work; and
- determining how to spend, within board policy, all funds they have raised.

In addition to determining how to spend funds allocated to them for their work and funds they have raised, school councils should have direct influence over the expenditure of a discretionary portion of their school's budget. This portion would enable councils to address the priorities they have established for their school. In making this recommendation, we do not intend that councils have the authority to approve major expenses like roof repairs or boiler replacements.

RECOMMENDATION 6: That school boards identify a discretionary portion of each school's budget for the school

council's consideration; and that principals bring discretionary-spending recommendations related to this portion of the budget to their school councils for the councils' consideration and approval.

Activities of School Councils

As we noted in our introduction, some school council members and school and board administrators could benefit from closer attention to the provisions of PPM 122. For example, the memorandum lists matters on which school councils may provide advice to principals and school boards. It introduces the list by stating that "A school council will provide advice...on any of the matters listed below that *the council* has identified as priorities..." (our emphasis). But we repeatedly heard that PPM 122 mandated "too many topics."

We also saw many examples of board policies that limited the responsibilities of councils to less than the *minimum* requirements set out in PPM 122. For example, some boards modified councils' role to provide advice on the "local school-year calendar" to read "school-year calendar *of events*" (our emphasis).

While a closer reading of PPM 122 might have avoided some of the frustrations experienced by school councils, principals, and school board administrators, we recommend that the ministry clarify the roles and responsibilities of councils.

RECOMMENDATION 7: That the Ministry of Education and Training clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of school councils in keeping with the recommendations of this report and ensure that council, school, and board practices are consistent with those roles and responsibilities.

PPM 122 requires principals and boards to consult school councils “on any of the matters listed...that the council has identified as priorities.” Councils need not take on every role or responsibility listed in PPM 122; they can set their own priorities. During our consultation, many people reminded us that, although they are willing and eager to become involved, they have limited time and energy to devote to council activities. Councils should act in accordance with the priorities they have set. If they are unable to tackle every issue listed or do not wish to respond to every issue on which they are consulted, they should not feel they are neglecting their duties.

Many school councils are involved in a range of worthwhile activities in addition to those set out in PPM 122, such as fundraising and co-ordinating school events. These activities are appropriate, but we encourage school councils to keep their fundamental purpose in mind and focus on those activities that will enhance student learning.

RECOMMENDATION 8: That school councils focus their activities on those that will improve the learning of the students in their local school.

Information Needed by School Councils

To work effectively, school councils, like everyone else, need information, direction, and the appropriate tools. We have addressed the need for clarification of the purpose of school councils and their roles and responsibilities. Some of the other areas in which they need guidance are discussed below.

In addition to the parent representatives on school councils, whose important role is emphasized throughout this report, the principal, student, staff, and community representatives also have specific roles to play. These roles should be understood by all members of the council.

Principal: Principals are designated members of councils. PPM 122 requires principals to facilitate and assist with the work of school councils. Among other required roles, they must support the council's activities, seek its advice in appropriate areas, and act as a resource. Their collaboration is essential to a council's success. We support the roles set out for principals in PPM 122.

To work effectively with school councils, principals need special skills. In

chapter 5, we make recommendations for principals' training requirements.

Student representative: Under PPM 122, each secondary school's council must have at least one student representative selected by the school's students; student representatives are optional at the elementary level.

Because students and student achievement are the focus of education reforms, a student voice is essential on school councils. Many students play leadership roles in their schools, contributing to a wide variety of aspects of student life. They can be particularly effective in campaigns against drug use, violence, and racism, and their energy level can be inspiring.

School staff: Under PPM 122, each council is required to have a teacher member elected by members of the school's teaching staff and a non-teaching staff member elected by non-teaching staff.

Teachers and other staff are important resources who know the school and students intimately. They can inform council discussions about school issues and also communicate council's concerns and plans back to the groups they represent. Their care for and knowledge of the school and its students make their input invaluable.

Community members: Because these members are the council's links with the broader, and often diverse, community served by a school, they can help it



If the objective of school councils is to allow students to play a collective and effective role in the life of the school, their involvement has to be meaningful.

- la Fédération des associations de parents franco-phones de l'Ontario



*Before I can be a better parent
or a better council member,
I need better information.
I need to know how my kids
are doing and what's going
on in their school. And I've got
to get that information in a
way that I can understand,
and I've got to get it while it's
still useful.*

– **Parent,**
Southwestern
Ontario

respond to the community's concerns. They can offer individual expertise, and can identify resources in the community that the school can use to set up mentoring programmes, student placements, and so on. They have a special role to play in communication and liaison.

The ministry, boards, and principals should all consult school councils, but on different topics. For example, the ministry should consult them about curriculum changes and provincial report cards; boards should consult them about the selection criteria for principals; and principals should consult them about school holidays and the scheduling of extracurricular activities.

Later in this report, we make recommendations about the specific topics on which we feel boards and principals should consult councils, and a mechanism through which the ministry could consult them.

Councils also need background information on the school and its programs, and specific information about how they can carry out their duties. The recommendations below outline the information, direction, and tools that we believe school councils need from the ministry, boards, and principals in order to work effectively.

RECOMMENDATION 9: That the Ministry of Education and Training provide school councils with the following, all clearly stated:

- a statement of the purpose of school councils;
- descriptions of the roles that each representative on a school council—parent, student, community member, principal, teacher, and other staff member—can and, in the case of the principal, will play in fulfilling the council's work, including the contributions that each representative can make;
- a list of substantive topics on which councils are to be consulted; and
- a statement of procedures such as those described in recommendation 3 that will ensure councils have time to provide input and their input is considered.

RECOMMENDATION 10: That principals and school boards provide school councils with the following, all clearly stated:

- thorough, up-to-date information about the school and board, including student achievement on provincial tests and the

results of other assessments of the school, its students, and the board;

- a list of substantive topics on which councils are to be consulted or for which they are to have responsibility;
- procedures and mechanisms councils can use to consult and communicate with all parents and the community in general;
- a statement of procedures such as those described in recommendation 4 that will ensure councils have time to provide input and their input is considered;
- copies of the school council handbook for each member;
- conflict resolution strategies; and
- a code of conduct.

The last three items in recommendation 10 are discussed in greater detail in chapter 5.

School council members and the administrators who work with them also need training. We also address this issue in chapter 5.

4. THREE VEHICLES to Improve Student Learning

Improving student learning is an important goal, but how can school councils best support it? We recommend three main areas of responsibility or “vehicles” that we believe will allow school councils to make a major contribution to this goal: fostering parental and community involvement in education; participating in the school improvement planning process; and influencing decisions made by principals, school boards, and the Ministry of Education and Training.

VEHICLE 1: Fostering Parental and Community Involvement in Education

RECOMMENDATION 11: That school councils take on a clear and substantive role in fostering parent and community involvement in the school, and that they work in consultation with their principals to build partnerships and working relationships with social service agencies, recreation departments and facilities, community and church groups, businesses, and industries.

As we have noted, research shows the importance of parental involvement in their children's education.³ We believe community involvement is important too. The 1994 report of the Royal Commission on Learning envisaged school councils as focusing on

the development of school-community partnerships. PPM 122, in its list of topics on which school councils may provide advice, includes some that are directly related to school-community partnerships. However, our review of current school council practices indicates that the fostering of parental and community involvement in the school has not been a priority to date.

PPM 122 gives increased parental involvement as the rationale for establishing school councils, but it focuses on the participation of parents who are members of the council. We believe that *all* members of school councils can encourage and support greater parental and community involvement in schools. Initiatives and activities they can undertake include the following:

- arranging parenting programs (examples include topics such as reading to your child, helping with homework, and effective discipline);
- conducting outreach activities that extend to all members of the community, such as the small towns and villages served by a school, Aboriginal members of a school community, and minorities in urban centres (examples of outreach activities include offering child care services during council meetings, translating key resource materials, and developing

partnerships with church groups and with community associations that represent cultural minorities);

- recruiting additional volunteers (examples of recruitment strategies include directly inviting individuals to participate in council activities, appointing community members who will help ensure that council membership is balanced and representative of the community, and developing a committee structure through which the number of people participating in council activities is increased); or
- drawing community resources into the school and creating partnerships that make the best use of community and school resources (examples of these activities include arranging to use public or church facilities, working with local social agencies and businesses, requesting the help of cultural groups' mentors, and asking community members to share their professional expertise and parents their personal experiences in supporting their own children's learning).

VEHICLE 2: Participating in the School Improvement Planning Process

In *The Road Ahead – II: A Report on the Role of School Boards and Trustees*, we recommended that boards be required



School councils could be a way to try to involve more parents and community members in the life of the school, not just those few who sit on the school council.

– Canadian Union of Public Employees



The primary focus of school councils should be participation in the conception of the school improvement plan and its evaluation.

– **School board administrator, Southeastern Ontario**

to demonstrate the accountability demanded by the public by publishing school board report cards, which would report on their performance in meeting locally established priorities. Since *The Road Ahead – II*, and as a result of our ongoing consultations, our thinking on this issue has evolved, as the following recommendations indicate.

RECOMMENDATION 12: That the Ministry of Education and Training require all principals, in consultation with their school councils, to publish and distribute annual *school profiles* that include statements about the school's values and priorities and statistical information about the school and its communities (number of students, cultural makeup, socioeconomic level, etc.).

RECOMMENDATION 13: That the Ministry of Education and Training require (1) all principals, in consultation with their school councils, and (2) all school boards, through their directors of education, to publish and distribute annual *report cards* that report on their performance and the achievement levels of their students, including results measured by provincial tests and other indicators.

RECOMMENDATION 14: That the Ministry of Education and Training require (1) all principals, in consultation

with their school councils, and (2) all school boards, through their directors of education, to develop, implement, monitor, and evaluate annual *improvement plans*; that the plans be based on an analysis of the information in their report cards; that the plans reflect the academic and other expectations established by ministry and board policy; that school plans be informed by the improvement goals of their boards and *vice versa*; and that the plans include a formal process for measuring and reporting progress towards improvement goals.

RECOMMENDATION 15: That supervisory officers hold principals accountable for preparing and distributing school profiles and school report cards, and developing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating school improvement plans; and that boards of trustees hold their directors of education accountable for preparing and distributing board report cards, and developing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating board improvement plans.

Most principals and boards already have an improvement planning process in place, whether it is called by this or another name, but the process varies considerably across the province. This variance is both inevitable and desirable, to the extent that it reflects the diversity of

the province and the differing priorities of boards and individual school communities. However, there needs to be greater consistency in both the process followed and the data measured.

Common procedures and formats for school profiles, report cards, and improvement plans would allow educators, parents, students, and the public to assess their own school's progress over time. It would also allow them to review the progress of their own school in the context of the performance of other schools that have similar profiles, in their own areas and across the province.

School councils *must* be included in the school improvement planning process to ensure that the priorities of the community are reflected in the school's plans. School councils are valuable resources. They represent the views of parents, students, community members, and staff, and they know their school communities well. They should take an active role in the communication of information, staying in contact with members of the community to ensure that they are well informed and that their input is requested, conveyed, and respected.

Recognizing that the principal has the formal responsibility for improvement planning, school councils should also participate in the development and monitoring of the plan. By reviewing school and overall student achievement and making recommendations for improvement,

councils can help keep schools focused on student achievement, and thereby increase parental and community confidence in the province's schools.

The following recommendation outlines our minimum expectations for the involvement of school councils in the school improvement planning process. However, we do not want this process to become static. We encourage collaboration among boards, principals, and school councils to ensure that plans are in keeping with provincial standards, board policies, and local priorities, and that they are implemented, monitored, and communicated to parents and the local community effectively.

RECOMMENDATION 16: That school boards and principals develop procedures to integrate school councils into the school improvement planning process, and that their integration include, as a minimum, the following elements:

- adequate timelines;
- access to the previous year's improvement plan and its results;
- access to overall school results on provincial tests, as well as results on other indicators;
- access to the results of other schools within the board's jurisdiction and across the province;
- input into the determination of the goals and strategies to be included in the school improvement plan for the year;

- access to the final school improvement plan, as well as a rationale for the goals and strategies selected;
- at least two brief oral or written progress reports from the principal at school council meetings, with an opportunity to respond and make suggestions; and
- input into the annual report on the school's progress in meeting its improvement plan.

As we stated in recommendation 14, schools should ensure that their plans reflect the goals of boards, and boards should ensure that their plans reflect the needs and goals of individual schools. In making their plans, boards, through their principals, should solicit and consider the input of the school councils in their jurisdictions. School boards now cover larger geographical areas with a smaller number of trustees. The contributions of school councils will help them maintain important links to every school community in their jurisdiction. Councils' involvement in board plans, however, will be less direct and extensive than in school plans.

RECOMMENDATION 17: That school boards develop and implement a process for ensuring that school councils are involved in the development, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting of board improvement plans.

VEHICLE 3: Influencing Decisions Made by Principals, School Boards, and the Ministry of Education and Training

PPM 122 sets out a list of the "roles and responsibilities" of school councils—matters on which they may offer advice—if they have identified these subjects as priorities. We support councils' providing advice on these matters, but both the topics and the consultation processes require clarification.

During our consultation we heard a lot of confusion about the list: Is it a comprehensive list on which councils *must* advise? Can they advise on topics that are not on the list? Can they advise boards and the ministry too, or should they stick to the local school level?

To clarify the issue, we propose that the Ministry of Education and Training identify a list of topics on which principals and school boards *must seek* the input of school councils. Individual school boards may choose to enhance this list with additional subjects. Individual school councils may choose to submit their views on any other matter that they have identified as a priority. As we said in the previous chapter, councils *may choose not to respond* to requests on issues that are not priorities for them.

This approach provides a measure of province-wide consistency, while allowing local flexibility to reflect the diversity of local needs across the province. It places



We do not want or need to be consulted on every issue – only on major issues and issues that matter

– Parent,
Southeastern
Ontario



The school council can serve to unite the school community around the common goal to which all can aspire: an improved student learning environment.

– Ontario Parent Council

the onus for seeking input on administrators and trustees, and allows individual school councils the freedom to respond to these requests according to their own priorities and energies.

Table 2 summarizes the topics on which we believe principals and school boards *must* seek the advice of school councils. It is not intended to replace the list of roles and responsibilities in PPM 122, but to enhance them. Some of the topics in table 2 have been addressed earlier in this report; others will be addressed in chapter 5. Appendix C expands on each of the consultation topics set out in table 2.

We emphasize that we do not expect school councils to be involved in day-to-day management or operational matters, but rather that principals and boards consult councils as part of the school and board policy and planning processes.

RECOMMENDATION 18: That the Ministry of Education and Training require principals and school boards to seek the advice of school councils on the issues identified as mandatory in table 2 of this report, and on additional issues that individual boards have determined to be priorities.

At any time, school councils may provide advice on issues that they have determined are priorities.

Table 2: Consultation with School Councils

<i>School councils must be consulted on ... (but need not respond)</i>	<i>By principals</i>	<i>By school boards</i>
Local school-year calendar: scheduling holidays and the beginning and end of school years	X	X
School and board codes/policies on student behaviour	X	X
Programme and curriculum priorities	X	X
School organization	X	
School and board policy on field trips	X	X
Preparation of the school profile	X	
Preparation of school and board improvement plans *	X	X
Preparation of school and board report cards	X	X
Selection criteria for principals		X
Performance appraisals of principal, superintendent, and director of education		X
School and board budget priorities	X	X
Capital-improvement plans		X
Naming of schools and other board property		X
School-community communication strategies	X	
Methods of reporting to parents and the community	X	
Extracurricular activities in the school	X	
School-based services and community partnerships related to social, health, recreational, and nutrition programmes	X	
Co-ordination of local services for children and youth	X	
Community use of school facilities	X	X
School closures and the twinning of schools		X
School boundaries		X
Other issues identified as priorities by boards and/or school councils	X	X

*Recommendation 16, earlier in this chapter, recommends that school councils be *extensively* involved in school improvement planning processes.

RECOMMENDATION 19: That the Ministry of Education and Training itself seek, and require principals and school boards to seek, the advice of school councils on the development and review of any policies relating to school councils and other forms of parental involvement in education.

Consultations are pointless unless the timelines are adequate and the advice is considered. In the end, the ministry, boards, and school principals are responsible for making decisions, but accountability mechanisms must ensure that the advice of school councils is taken into account. Decision makers must communicate their decisions and the rationale for their decisions to the councils. Councils are entitled to learn what happened to their advice. Recommendations 3 and 4 address this issue.

We point out that many schools and boards have already adopted the practices described above. Some boards, for example, require principals to give school councils a written response to any written recommendation submitted by the council. Some limit this requirement to advice that is not taken. These practices ensure that council members are kept informed about decisions affecting their school. They also increase council members' understanding of the various perspectives principals must consider in reaching decisions. We suggest that a response and rationale is also

appropriate in those cases where school councils have submitted written, unsolicited suggestions for change.

Among the consultation topics listed in table 2 are the selection criteria for principals.

RECOMMENDATION 20: That the Ministry of Education and Training require school boards, in establishing selection criteria for principals, to consult school councils about the qualities they seek in a principal, given the specific needs of their schools.

RECOMMENDATION 21: That the Ministry of Education and Training require school boards to include parent members of school councils on their appropriate selection committees for principals.

We recognize that recommendation 21 will be implemented differently in large boards than in small ones. For example, a board with a large number of schools might invite parent members of school councils to sit on the principal selection committees for each school or family of schools. A board with a small number of schools might invite parent members to sit on teams selecting a pool of principals for the board's jurisdiction. We were sorry to learn that, after amalgamation, many boards discontinued parental involvement

on these committees. Parents have a vital interest in these selections, and their involvement should be mandated.

We believe school councils should also have an opportunity to influence decisions made by the Ministry of Education and Training and other provincial bodies like the Education Quality and Accountability Office and the Ontario College of Teachers. At present, the Ontario Parent Council (OPC) provides this type of input to the ministry.

RECOMMENDATION 22: That the Ministry of Education and Training restructure the Ontario Parent Council (OPC) into a provincial body that represents the province's school councils; that the new organization consist of parents elected by school councils; that the membership be representative of all four publicly funded systems, as well as the geographic regions of the province; and that the ministry and its agencies seek the advice of the restructured OPC on those issues that fall within the responsibilities of school councils.

The new organization must not be large and bureaucratic; it must not replicate school boards or other administrative structures that exist at present. It should have two roles: providing advice to the Minister of Education and Training, as described in the recommendation, and helping school councils share best practices.



A group of parents and school council members meet to discuss school council issues and the role of the community.

School council chair,
Southwestern
Ontario

5. OTHER KEY ISSUES

In this chapter, we address some key issues and problems faced by school councils in trying to fulfil their mandate, and relate some of the successful procedures they are using to get the job done.

Space does not permit us to cover in detail all of the issues on which people commented during our consultations. However, appendix D contains, in table form, an extensive review of what we heard about the provisions of PPM 122 during our consultation, as well as our own responses and suggestions on each issue. We hope this detailed information will be of use to the ministry in establishing policy relating to school councils, and to boards and school councils in establishing their procedures.

Community Representation

PPM 122 directs that school councils be representative of parents, students, school staff, and the community. Most school councils have a full complement of members, but some have had difficulty attracting and retaining community members or getting certain segments of the community involved.

School councils must represent the interests and values of the entire community. To do this, their membership must reflect the community or communities they serve.

RECOMMENDATION 23: That principals and school councils be jointly responsible for ensuring that school council membership is representative of the school's entire community or communities.

To represent the community, the principal and school council members must conduct outreach activities aimed at attracting parent and community members from all groups in the community, including visible minorities, Native people, people with disabilities or the physically challenged, and people from socio-economically disadvantaged areas. In addition, they should balance representation from parents of students at various grade levels and divisions within the school.

Beyond persuading people who represent different aspects of the community to act as school council members, councils should also solicit their assistance on council committees and encourage their participation in other volunteer activities at the school.

We have dedicated a considerable amount of time to this issue and gathered examples of effective outreach strategies. They include consulting and seeking the assistance of cultural mentors in the community, asking community members to

participate in specific projects or ad hoc committees, meeting in barrier-free venues, providing child care during meetings, organizing transportation pools, and seeking community members from among seniors. Individual parents may require translation assistance to ensure they are able to participate. Exemplary practices in this area include councils seeking volunteer translators to help out and council members partnering with parents to provide translation services.

We acknowledge that community representation is a challenge and that many school councils are working hard to meet it. Where councils are unsuccessful in recruiting representatives of a certain part of the community, we urge them to take care to consider the views of these groups in their work.

Council Membership

During our consultations, we heard from people who oppose allowing teachers and other school board employees to sit as parent members of school councils. These people fear that the presence of board staff will tip the balance of representation away from parents and towards the interests of the board or staff unions.

Others, including teachers and board staff, argue that board employees should have the same rights as other parents to participate in the education of their children, including sitting on school coun-

If school councils are unable to successfully encourage participation of the entire community, they will be unable to execute their mandate fully

– Parent,
Central Ontario

cils. They point out that, if no controls are in place, members of *any* special interest group could attempt to dominate a council.

In the fall of 1998, we asked the Minister of Education and Training, as an interim measure, until we had consulted more widely, to clarify the intent of PPM 122. The Minister subsequently wrote a letter to school boards on this matter.

We have now studied the issue thoroughly. We support council memberships that are balanced in favour of parents and that are structured so as to avoid takeover by special interest groups. However, we also understand the desire of teachers and other board staff to exercise their rights as parents. Their concern for their children's education is no less than the concern of other parents.

Later in this chapter, we recommend a code of conduct for school council members, which will go a long way towards ensuring that anyone who sits as a parent member of a council will act as a "parent." In addition, we sought and received specific assurances from the Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF), its affiliates, and other unions representing board staff that they also oppose members of school councils representing special interests. In a letter to the Commission, OTF said, "The pursuit of individual or group interests would only serve to deflect a school council from its

primary purpose of ensuring that children get the best education possible."⁴

RECOMMENDATION 24: That board employees be eligible for election to the position of parent representative on a school council, *except for the council of the school at which they work and subject to declaring their position and or affiliation when running for election.*

RECOMMENDATION 25: That teachers and other board employees not be eligible to serve as chairs of school councils.

Communication

Communication is a challenge for many councils. Some school council members do not receive the information they need to carry out their responsibilities; others report being inundated with information. The preparation and maintenance of school council membership lists is a problem, hampered by inconsistencies from school to school and board to board on such procedures as the timing of elections. In many regions councils experience difficulty in contacting one another. In some cases, members of the school's community are not aware of the council's activities.

These problems are linked to issues addressed earlier in this report. Because the councils are new and their mandate has been unclear, many people do not

know what to share or with whom. In many schools, uncertainty has been compounded by a lack of financial and other support for effective communication.

We did hear of effective communication practices, such as principals inviting school councils to contribute to newsletters and correspondence sent home to parents (for example, to provide notice of council meetings); information about the council's activities being included on a school information phone line or posted on a school or council web site; and schools providing councils with space to display their materials, as well as space where parents and community members visiting the school can meet.

PPM 122 states that "all meetings [of the school council] shall be open to members of the school community," and we support this requirement.

In many boards, representatives of school councils meet on a regular basis to share information and best practices, and to attend workshops on such topics as communication strategies. Such meetings can be held by representatives of all school councils in a board or a family of schools.

We support recent initiatives of the Ministry of Education and Training aimed at ensuring that school councils receive information intended for them. Problems still exist in some boards, however, and the initiative should be reinforced and applied to both boards and principals.





RECOMMENDATION 26: That school and board administrators ensure that correspondence and other material intended for school councils is passed along to the councils.

RECOMMENDATION 27: That the school newsletter and other school communication devices at the local school level include information submitted by the school council, including the names of members, the council's goals for the year, the dates of upcoming meetings, and any other material that the council deems appropriate and that is consistent with the provisions of the council's code of conduct.

RECOMMENDATION 28: That, where feasible, school councils, with the assistance of administrators, organize regularly scheduled regional forums for the purposes of sharing best practices and holding workshops on effective communication strategies and other topics related to fulfilling their mandate.

Training

Training programs were put in place when school councils were initiated in 1995, but with the large turnover in membership, many newer council members have not experienced this training. Similarly, the school council handbook prepared by the ministry includes excel-

lent material, but most parents and members are unaware of it. Some boards, however, offer exemplary training programs.

All members of school councils, not just chairs, require training to ensure effectiveness and continuity in the councils' activities. Training topics include running meetings, setting priorities, resolving conflicts, reaching consensus, understanding communication techniques, building teams, and developing and implementing outreach strategies. At a more basic level, council members require information sessions on school, board, and ministry procedures and priorities. We realized during our consultation that many committed parents and community members, especially recent immigrants, have no idea how education works in Canada.

Training programs must also be cost-efficient. Some of the effective training practices we heard about include the "train the trainer" model, co-operation among several boards or collaboration with community groups in offering training programs, and the use of telecommunications techniques.

RECOMMENDATION 29: That the Ministry of Education and Training ensure that school councils are provided with support for the training needs of their members.

RECOMMENDATION 30: That the school council handbook prepared by the Ministry of Education and Training be revised, reissued, and distributed to all school boards and school council members, and that it include training recommendations for council members.

Conflict Resolution

Training in conflict resolution will help council members sort out their differences, but some conflict may be unavoidable. School boards, in consultation with their school councils, should establish a conflict resolution process before problems occur.

RECOMMENDATION 31: That the Ministry of Education and Training require school boards to establish, in consultation with their school councils, a conflict resolution process for the councils in their jurisdiction.

We respect the differences among boards in the province, and anticipate that they and their councils will make their own determinations of how to resolve such conflicts. As we noted in our introduction, a common will to succeed is vital to the effectiveness of a school council. Most council members will want to resolve their conflicts internally. Where they are unable to do so, they could have the options of then requesting the

involvement of their superintendent, director of education, or trustees. Whatever the conflict resolution process, if it fails, an appeal mechanism is required.

RECOMMENDATION 32: That the Ministry of Education and Training develop a list of independent mediators jointly approved by the school board associations and the restructured OPC referred to in recommendation 22, and that it appoint a mediator from this list to assist school councils that are unable to resolve conflicts internally or through their boards' conflict resolution process.

Code of Conduct

We have stated our belief that the purpose of school councils is to improve student learning. To keep all council members focused on this purpose, no single interest must dominate the council. We also referred earlier to some people's fears that teachers sitting on councils as parents could dominate the council, but other possibilities exist, including domination by a specific cultural, political, philosophical, or business interest.

RECOMMENDATION 33: That the Ministry of Education and Training establish a code of conduct for school council members; that the code

include, as a minimum, the following elements:

- a focus on student learning and what is otherwise best for students in the school,
- the need to keep in mind the values and priorities of the entire community,
- privacy of information provisions, and
- safeguards against control by special interests;

that these standards be reflected in school board policies and school council handbooks; and that school councils establish their own codes of conduct based on the ministry code and board policies.

Excellent examples of school council codes of conduct already exist in some parts of the province.

Effectiveness of School Councils

We have already stated that we believe PPM 122 to be an excellent document, but that it requires measures to ensure effective implementation of its provisions. The following recommendations are made with these requirements in mind.

RECOMMENDATION 34: That school councils monitor and assess their own effectiveness by seeking feedback from the school community.

RECOMMENDATION 35: That school and school board report cards report on the performance or effectiveness of school councils, with councils having input into the report.

RECOMMENDATION 36: That the Ministry of Education and Training ensure that a formal, province-wide review of school councils takes place in three years.

In making this recommendation, we acknowledge that not all school councils will be able to achieve the standard envisaged by this report in the next three years, and that many are already beyond it.

Accountability of Principals, Superintendents, and Directors of Education

Research is clear that the principal is the key to establishing and maintaining an effective school.⁵ Our consultation has convinced us that principals are also vital to school councils achieving success.

School councils can support student learning best if their relationship with their principals is one of trust and mutual respect. Principals in turn must be supported by supervisory officers—superintendents and directors of education—who are committed to successful councils. The skills necessary to this chain of support need to be enhanced at all levels. We have



The principal can make or break a school council.

– School council member,
Northwestern Ontario



already made recommendations with respect to the training of school council members, and we now turn to the training of principals and other key board staff.

RECOMMENDATION 37: That the Ontario College of Teachers ensure that certification courses for principals and supervisory officers address the skills required to: manage change collaboratively; create an inviting school environment; consult and communicate with parents and the public; work with diverse interest groups to reach consensus; negotiate; and build partnerships.

RECOMMENDATION 38: That school boards include in their in-service training and professional development courses for principals and supervisory officers the skills described in recommendation 37.

The nature of performance appraisals is changing. Many companies now seek the views of clients and staff in evaluating the performance of their executives. Similarly, many boards now seek the observations of parents, students, and staff to inform their own assessment of the performance of their administrators.

In chapter 4, we recommended that school councils play key roles in the selection process for principals. We also believe that their views should be sought by

superintendents conducting performance appraisals of principals, and by boards evaluating the performance of superintendents and directors of education.

RECOMMENDATION 39: That the Ministry of Education and Training require school boards, as part of their evaluation policies and procedures, to seek the opinions of parent and community representatives on school councils, as one source of feedback on the performance of principals, superintendents, and directors of education.

RECOMMENDATION 40: That one of the criteria in the performance appraisals of principals, superintendents, and directors of education be their ability to create an environment that is inviting to parents and the community.

We recognize that boards are likely to use different processes to solicit the views of school councils on the performance of principals than for supervisory officers and directors. However, it is important that boards establish processes, and that they consult school councils as these processes are being developed or revised.

Funding Support

Our consultations made it clear that, to function effectively, school councils need funding and other resources to support

communication and training and to conduct their meetings. We repeatedly heard the following messages: that funding support for councils must not come from funding allocated to classrooms; that the portion of funding allocated to councils must be clear; and that funding support for councils must be “new money,” albeit a limited amount.

RECOMMENDATION 41: That the Minister of Education and Training address the issue of funding and other resources for school councils.

We also heard many examples of school councils co-operating with their school administration, local businesses, agencies, local facilities, and other schools and school councils to keep costs down. Examples of such economies include inserting council communications into the school newsletter to save separate mailing costs, providing councils with access to the school’s computers and Internet service, and collaborating with other school councils to arrange for guest speakers and workshops. We urge councils to continue seeking creative, imaginative solutions to funding issues and economize wherever possible.

Legal and Financial Liability

During our consultation, members of school councils and the public expressed

concern about the legal liability of councils and the individuals who sit on them. Uncertainty surrounding this issue is limiting or deterring the participation of some parents and community members in school councils.

The legal advice we received is that school councils and their members are covered by their board's general liability insurance, providing they are acting within the scope of ministry directives and board policy. But we were also asked: What if members are involved in activities beyond the "minimum requirements" described in PPM 122? This report's clearer description of the role of school councils will help alleviate the problem, but our legal advice is that, in addition, board policy should specify that school councils and their individual members are covered.

RECOMMENDATION 42: That the Ministry of Education and Training direct school boards to ensure that they have adequate liability insurance coverage for school councils to carry out their responsibilities.

We also heard concerns with respect to the handling of money raised by school councils: Who is liable if these funds are misappropriated? Laws are already in place to deal with this situation, but, in

addition, each school board should have a policy that specifically sets out procedures related to the handling of money and should ensure that school council members understand these policies.

RECOMMENDATION 43: That the Ministry of Education and Training direct school boards to review their policies on the handling of money and clarify them for school councils and other parent groups.

The provisions of boards' policies and insurance coverage should not be obstacles to the effectiveness of school councils working within their mandate. If changes are needed for councils to carry out their role, they should be implemented.



Ongoing training for council members is essential. We need some ideas about how to run effective meetings, how to recruit people from the community, and so forth.

**– Parent,
Southern Ontario**

6. SUMMARY



School councils develop well when parents are clear about their roles and the goals of the council... when there is encouragement for parents to become involved... and when they have access to professional development for their participation.

– **Kenneth Leithwood, Doris Jantzi, and Rosanne Steinbach, “Do School Councils Matter?” 7.**

This report outlines a meaningful role for school councils, one that encourages and facilitates the involvement of parents in their children’s education. Our recommendations are based on an extensive research and consultation process, and guided by a set of principles, the first of which is “Put students first.”

This document does not replace the Ministry of Education and Training’s Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM) No. 122, *School Board Policies on School Councils*. PPM 122 sets out the mandate of school councils and the minimum requirements for their composition and operation. It remains in force until the Minister of Education and Training directs otherwise.

Education in Ontario is a partnership of the province, school boards, and school communities. School councils have a vital advisory role to play in this partnership, primarily at the level of their local school, but also with respect to the decisions made by boards and the province.

During our consultation, many parents, school council members, and others in the education community expressed confusion about the purpose of school councils. Because the focus of education reform is to improve programmes and increase accountability for student achievement, we believe that the fundamental purpose of school councils is to improve student learning.

We suggest three “vehicles” through which councils can make significant contributions to this goal:

- vehicle 1: by fostering parental and community involvement in education;
- vehicle 2: by participating in the school improvement planning process; and
- vehicle 3: by influencing decisions made by principals, school boards, and the Ministry of Education and Training.

We make several recommendations aimed at ensuring school councils have an impact in these areas.

We also address, and make recommendations on, other issues that we heard about during our consultations: community representation on school councils, council membership, communication, conflict resolution, a code of conduct, funding, and financial and legal liability. We recommend training for school council members, and for the principals, superintendents, and directors of education with whom they work.

We also recommend that school councils have input into selection criteria for principals, and into the performance appraisal process for principals, superintendents, and directors of education. Finally, we recommend that councils be monitored for effectiveness and that they be reviewed in three years.

Our recommendations, however, and ministry policies cannot replace a common will to make school councils succeed. In the end, it is parents, school council members, principals, school staff members, board administrators, and trustees, working in a collaborative and supportive manner, who will make school councils work.

APPENDICES

Appendix A:

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: That the Ministry of Education and Training develop a bill of parents' rights that consolidates the parents' rights already set out in legislation, and adds, as a minimum, the rights to:

- accurate, detailed, and timely information about their child's progress;
- thorough information about the performance of their local school;
- information about how they can support their child's educational progress; and
- opportunities to provide input into their child's educational programme.

Recommendation 2: That the Ministry of Education and Training state that the purpose of school councils is to improve student learning.

Recommendation 3: That the Ministry of Education and Training change its procedures so as to integrate school councils into its policy development

and implementation process for those issues that fall within the responsibilities of school councils; and that the new procedures include adequate timelines for consultation, as well as feedback to school councils on decisions made and rationales for decisions made.

Recommendation 4: That school boards and principals change their procedures so as to integrate school councils into their policy development and implementation processes for those issues that fall within the responsibilities of school councils; and that the new procedures include adequate timelines for consultation, as well as feedback to school councils on decisions made and rationales for decisions made.

Recommendation 5: That the Ministry of Education and Training clarify that school councils are responsible for:

- electing a chair of their council from among their members who are parents;
- appointing community members to their council;
- establishing their bylaws and operating procedures (how to conduct meetings, etc.);

- determining the content and methods of their communications;
- determining how to spend the funds allocated to them to cover the cost of their work; and
- determining how to spend, within board policy, all funds they have raised.

Recommendation 6: That school boards identify a discretionary portion of each school's budget for the school council's consideration; and that principals bring discretionary-spending recommendations related to this portion of the budget to their school councils for the councils' consideration and approval.

Recommendation 7: That the Ministry of Education and Training clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of school councils in keeping with the recommendations of this report, and ensure that council, school, and board practices are consistent with those roles and responsibilities.

Recommendation 8: That school councils focus their activities on those that will improve the learning of the students in their local school.

Recommendation 9: That the Ministry of Education and Training provide school councils with the

following, all clearly stated:

- a statement of the purpose of school councils;
- descriptions of the roles that each representative on a school council—parent, student, community member, principal, teacher, and other staff member—can and, in the case of the principal, will play in fulfilling the council's work, including the contributions that each representative can make;
- a list of substantive topics on which councils are to be consulted; and
- a statement of procedures such as those described in recommendation 3 that will ensure councils have time to provide input and their input is considered.

Recommendation 10: That principals and school boards provide school councils with the following, all clearly stated:

- thorough, up-to-date information about the school and board, including student achievement on provincial tests and the results of other assessments of the school, its students, and the board;
- a list of substantive topics on which councils are to be consulted or for which they are to have responsibility;

- procedures and mechanisms councils can use to consult and communicate with all parents and the community in general;
- a statement of procedures such as those described in recommendation 4 that will ensure councils have time to provide input and their input is considered;
- copies of the school council handbook for each member;
- conflict resolution strategies; and
- a code of conduct.

Recommendation 11: That school councils take on a clear and substantive role in fostering parent and community involvement in the school, and that they work in consultation with their principals to build partnerships and working relationships with social service agencies, recreation departments and facilities, community and church groups, businesses, and industries.

Recommendation 12: That the Ministry of Education and Training require all principals, in consultation with their school councils, to publish and distribute annual *school profiles* that include statements about the school's values and priorities and statistical information about the school and its communities (number of students, cultural makeup, socioeconomic level, etc.).

Recommendation 13: That the Ministry of Education and Training require (1) all principals, in consultation with their school councils, and (2) all school boards, through their directors of education, to publish and distribute annual *report cards* that report on their performance and the achievement levels of their students, including results measured by provincial tests and other indicators.

Recommendation 14: That the Ministry of Education and Training require (1) all principals, in consultation with their school councils, and (2) all school boards, through their directors of education, to develop, implement, monitor, and evaluate annual *improvement plans*; that the plans be based on an analysis of the information in their report cards; that the plans reflect the academic and other expectations established by ministry and board policy; that school plans be informed by the improvement goals of their boards and *vice versa*; and that the plans include a formal process for measuring and reporting progress towards improvement goals.

Recommendation 15: That supervisory officers hold principals accountable for preparing and distributing school profiles and school report cards, and developing, implementing,

monitoring, and evaluating school improvement plans; and that boards of trustees hold their directors of education accountable for preparing and distributing board report cards, and developing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating board improvement plans.

Recommendation 16: That school boards and principals develop procedures to integrate school councils into the school improvement planning process, and that their integration include, as a minimum, the following elements:

- adequate timelines;
- access to the previous year's improvement plan and its results;
- access to overall school results on provincial tests, as well as results on other indicators;
- access to the results of other schools within the board's jurisdiction and across the province;
- input into the determination of the goals and strategies to be included in the school improvement plan for the year;
- access to the final school improvement plan, as well as a rationale for the goals and strategies selected;
- at least two brief oral or written progress reports from the principal at school council meetings, with

an opportunity to respond and make suggestions; and

- input into the annual report on the school's progress in meeting its improvement plan.

Recommendation 17: That school boards develop and implement a process for ensuring that school councils are involved in the development, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting of board improvement plans.

Recommendation 18: That the Ministry of Education and Training require principals and school boards to seek the advice of school councils on the issues identified as mandatory in table 2 of this report, and on additional issues that individual boards have determined to be priorities.

Recommendation 19: That the Ministry of Education and Training itself seek, and require principals and school boards to seek, the advice of school councils on the development and review of any policies relating to school councils and other forms of parental involvement in education.

Recommendation 20: That the Ministry of Education and Training require school boards, in establishing selection criteria for principals, to

consult school councils about the qualities they seek in a principal, given the specific needs of their schools.

Recommendation 21: That the Ministry of Education and Training require school boards to include parent members of school councils on their appropriate selection committees for principals.

Recommendation 22: That the Ministry of Education and Training restructure the Ontario Parent Council (OPC) into a provincial body that represents the province's school councils; that the new organization consist of parents elected by school councils; that the membership be representative of all four publicly funded systems, as well as the geographic regions of the province; and that the ministry and its agencies seek the advice of the restructured OPC on those issues that fall within the responsibilities of school councils.

Recommendation 23: That principals and school councils be jointly responsible for ensuring that school council membership is representative of the school's entire community or communities.

Recommendation 24: That board employees be eligible for election to

the position of parent representative on a school council, *except for* the council of the school at which they work and *subject to* declaring their position and/or affiliation when running for election.

Recommendation 25: That teachers and other board employees not be eligible to serve as chairs of school councils.

Recommendation 26: That school and board administrators ensure that correspondence and other material intended for school councils is passed along to the councils.

Recommendation 27: That the school newsletter and other school communication devices at the local school level include information submitted by the school council, including the names of members, the council's goals for the year, the dates of upcoming meetings, and any other material that the council deems appropriate and that is consistent with the provisions of the council's code of conduct.

Recommendation 28: That, where feasible, school councils, with the assistance of administrators, organize regularly scheduled regional forums for the purposes of sharing best practices and holding workshops on effective com-

munication strategies and other topics related to fulfilling their mandate.

Recommendation 29: That the Ministry of Education and Training ensure that school councils are provided with support for the training needs of their members.

Recommendation 30: That the school council handbook prepared by the Ministry of Education and Training be revised, reissued, and distributed to all school boards and school council members, and that it include training recommendations for council members.

Recommendation 31: That the Ministry of Education and Training require school boards to establish, in consultation with their school councils, a conflict resolution process for the councils in their jurisdiction.

Recommendation 32: That the Ministry of Education and Training develop a list of independent mediators jointly approved by the school board associations and the restructured OPC referred to in recommendation 22, and that it appoint a mediator from this list to assist school councils that are unable to resolve conflicts internally or through their boards' conflict resolution process.

Recommendation 33: That the Ministry of Education and Training establish a code of conduct for school council members; that the code include, as a minimum, the following elements:

- a focus on student learning and what is otherwise best for students in the school,
- the need to keep in mind the values and priorities of the entire community,
- privacy of information provisions, and
- safeguards against control by special interests;

that these standards be reflected in school board policies and school council handbooks; and that school councils establish their own codes of conduct based on the ministry code and board policies.

Recommendation 34: That school councils monitor and assess their own effectiveness by seeking feedback from the school community.

Recommendation 35: That school and school board report cards report on the performance or effectiveness of school councils, with councils having input into the report.

Recommendation 36: That the Ministry of Education and Training

ensure that a formal, province-wide review of school councils takes place in three years.

Recommendation 37: That the Ontario College of Teachers ensure that certification courses for principals and supervisory officers address the skills required to: manage change collaboratively; create an inviting school environment; consult and communicate with parents and the public; work with diverse interest groups to reach consensus; negotiate; and build partnerships.

Recommendation 38: That school boards include in their in-service training and professional development courses for principals and supervisory officers the skills described in recommendation 37.

Recommendation 39: That the Ministry of Education and Training require school boards, as part of their evaluation policies and procedures, to seek the opinions of parent and community representatives on school councils, as one source of feedback on the performance of principals, superintendents, and directors of education.

Recommendation 40: That one of the criteria in the performance appraisals of principals, superintendents, and directors of education be their ability to create an environment that is inviting to parents and the community.

Recommendation 41: That the Minister of Education and Training address the issue of funding and other resources for school councils.

Recommendation 42: That the Ministry of Education and Training direct school boards to ensure that they have adequate liability insurance coverage for school councils to carry out their responsibilities.

Recommendation 43: That the Ministry of Education and Training direct school boards to review their policies on the handling of money and clarify them for school councils and other parent groups.

Appendix B:

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING POLICY/ PROGRAM MEMO- RANDUM NO. 122



Ministry of Education
and Training

Issued under the authority of the Deputy
Minister of Education and Training

Date of Issue: April 12, 1995
Effective: Until revoked or modified

**Subject: SCHOOL BOARD POLICIES
ON SCHOOL COUNCILS**

Application: Chairpersons of School
Boards and Minority-
Language Sections
Directors of Education
Principals of Schools

BACKGROUND

The government recognizes that the education of Ontario's young people is a shared responsibility involving schools, students and their families, and members of the community. Parents and guardians have the right, as well as the responsibility, to participate in the education of their children, and can contribute to their children's development in a wide variety of ways. Other members of the community, including members of health, social service, and recreational agencies, also offer a wealth of experience and expertise that may be of benefit to students. Students themselves may have some excellent suggestions pertaining to their education. Members of all of these groups should, therefore, have the opportunity to advise in educational matters.

The Ministry of Education and Training is committed to encouraging partnerships that will enhance the education of the province's young people and foster increased sharing of information about the programs being offered by schools. In Ontario, many schools already have an association or committee that enables parents and other community members to provide input on topics pertaining to the school's educational program. Feedback from these committees and associations and from the schools has been

positive and encouraging, and indicates that community participation has been very valuable.

The recent reports of the Royal Commission on Learning and the Ontario Parent Council have recommended that all schools be required to establish advisory committees to increase communication between schools and their communities and, in the words of the commission's report, to enable parents and students to assume "a more responsible and active role" in education programs and services within their local community. These reports support similar recommendations made over the years by provincial parent associations.

DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL BOARD POLICIES ON SCHOOL COUNCILS

The provincial policy on school councils will require school boards and minority-language sections to develop policies that direct schools in their jurisdictions to begin the establishment of school councils in September 1995, and to ensure that a school council is in place in all schools by June 1996. This memorandum outlines the minimum requirements for the composition and functioning of school councils that must be included in each school board's or section's policy. (Henceforth in this document, the

term "school board" includes minority-language sections.)

School board policies should enable school communities either to establish entirely new organizations as the school councils or to set up the school councils by adapting existing parent/community associations or committees so that they conform to the requirements set out in this memorandum. It is important to note, however, that school communities may have parent/community organizations in addition to the school councils. The school councils are not intended to replace such organizations, which continue to make valuable contributions within the education community.

School boards are encouraged to involve parents in the development of board policies on school councils.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR THE COMPOSITION AND OPERA- TION OF SCHOOL COUNCILS

School boards must ensure that the following requirements are included in their policies on school councils.

- 1. Membership and Term of Office**
Members of a school council shall include, but not be limited to:
 - parents and guardians of students enrolled in the school;

- community representatives;
- a student (mandatory in secondary schools; in elementary schools, at the discretion of the principal);
- the school principal;
- a teacher;
- a non-teaching staff member.

Parents and guardians shall form the majority of the council, except in adult day schools, where parent positions shall be held by students. It is expected that the membership of the council will reflect the diversity of the school community.

Membership in the school council shall be determined in the following ways:

- Parents shall be elected by parents and guardians of students enrolled in the school.
- The chair of the council shall be a member who is also a parent and shall be elected by the council.
- Community representatives shall be appointed by the council.
- The student representative shall be elected by students.
- The school principal shall be a designated member.
- The teacher representative shall be elected by members of the teaching staff.
- The non-teaching staff member shall be elected by members of the non-teaching staff.

The term of office for elected and appointed positions shall be one or two years, as determined by board policy. Elected and appointed members may seek additional terms of office.

There will be no honorarium paid to members of the school council.

2. Roles and Responsibilities of the School Councils

School councils are advisory bodies. A school council will provide advice to the school principal and, where appropriate, to the school board on any of the matters listed below that the council has identified as priorities:

- local school-year calendar
- school code of student behaviour
- curriculum and program goals and priorities
- the responses of the school or school board to achievement in provincial and board assessment programs
- preparation of the school profile
- selection of principals
- school budget priorities, including local capital-improvement plans
- school-community communication strategies
- methods of reporting to parents and the community
- extracurricular activities in the school
- school-based services and community partnerships related to social,

health, recreational, and nutrition programs

- community use of school facilities
- local co-ordination of services for children and youth
- development, implementation, and review of board policies at the local level

The provincial policy will require that a school board's policy direct the school principal and, where relevant, senior staff and trustees of the board to seek advice from the school council as part of the process of making decisions with regard to the matters listed above.

In addition to its advisory responsibilities, the school council shall:

- establish its goals, priorities, and procedures;
- organize information and training sessions to enable members of the council to develop their skills as council members;
- hold a minimum of four meetings per year (all meetings shall be open to members of the school community);
- communicate regularly with parents and other members of the community to seek their views and preferences with regard to matters being addressed by the council, and to report on the activities of the council to the school community;

- promote the best interests of the school community.

3. Roles and Responsibilities of School Council Members

a) Chair

The chair of the school council shall:

- call school council meetings;
- prepare the agenda for school council meetings;
- chair school council meetings;
- ensure that the minutes of school council meetings are recorded and maintained;
- participate in information and training programs;
- communicate with the school principal;
- ensure that there is regular communication with the school community;
- consult with senior board staff and trustees, as required.

b) Council Members

The members of the school council shall:

- participate in council meetings;
- participate in information and training programs;
- act as a link between the school council and the community;
- encourage the participation of parents from all groups and of other people within the school community.

c) The Principal

The principal of the school shall:

- facilitate the establishment of the school council and assist in its operation;
- support and promote the council's activities;
- seek input from the council in areas for which it has been assigned advisory responsibility;
- act as a resource on laws, regulations, board policies, and collective agreements;
- obtain and provide information required by the council to enable it to make informed decisions;
- communicate with the chair of the council, as required;
- ensure that copies of the minutes of the council's meetings are kept at the school;
- assist the council in communicating with the school community;
- encourage the participation of parents from all groups and of other people within the school community.

4. The School Board and the School Councils

Some school boards already include parents and other members of the community in an advisory role at the board

level. School boards are encouraged to continue, or to initiate, this practice. Boards are also encouraged to facilitate communication among the school councils within their jurisdiction.

School boards shall review and revise their policies on the selection of principals to ensure that the school councils participate in principal selection. Boards shall also involve representatives of their school councils in the revision of these policies.

5. Evaluation and Reporting

School boards shall develop procedures for evaluating the implementation of their policies on the establishment and operation of school councils.

A report on the establishment and operation of the school councils shall be included in the annual report of the director of education of each school board.

ASSISTANCE FROM THE MINISTRY

School Council Handbook

The ministry will collaborate with stakeholders to produce a school council handbook to assist school boards, schools, and school councils. The handbook will contain materials and information to help boards establish school councils and to assist the

members of school councils in carrying out their responsibilities. It will be available in September 1995.

Professional Development

The ministry will work with school boards and other organizations and stakeholders to ensure that such programs as the Supervisory Officer's Qualification Program and the Principal's Qualification Program prepare school board members and principals for their work with school councils. The ministry will also collaborate with boards and other stakeholders to develop in-service programs and materials for school council members.

School Council Forum

The ministry and stakeholder groups will organize a School Council Forum in the spring of 1996. This forum is intended to provide opportunities for representatives of school councils and school boards throughout the province to discuss their experiences in setting up and maintaining their councils. It will also enable members of school councils across the province to establish a basis for networking. Further details about the forum will be provided later this year [1995].

Appendix C:

TOPICS ON WHICH SCHOOL COUNCILS MUST BE CONSULTED

The material that follows expands on the consultation topics listed in column 1 of table 2, Consultation with School Councils. Most of the items extend or clarify the existing provisions of PPM 122; some add to those provisions.

Local school year calendar: scheduling holidays and the beginning and end of school years

To help Ontario schools respond to their communities, school councils must have input into the scheduling of school holidays and the school year. For example, a school with a large Muslim enrolment may wish to ensure that exams or major projects are not scheduled during *Eid*; a school in a tourist area, where families are unable to take vacations in summer, may wish to modify the school year to start in August, with holidays scheduled during the fall.

School and board codes/policies on student behaviour

Principals and boards must involve school councils in the development of their codes/policies of student behav-

iour. Councils can provide valuable advice on all aspects, including ways to ensure safe and violence-free schools.

Programme and curriculum priorities

Principals must consult school councils on the school's programme priorities, within the context of the provincial curriculum. Programme areas that might be considered in establishing priorities include outdoor education and French immersion. Boards must consult parents and school councils on the development of policies and priorities on curricula and programmes.

School organization

Principals must consult councils on such aspects of school organization as grade configurations (e.g., split grades, "family" groupings) and subject delivery (e.g., integration).

School and board policy on field trips

Principals must consult councils on the operational aspects of field trips (e.g., funding, amount of student contribution, supervision), and boards must consult them on field trip policy.

Preparation of the school profile

School councils are an important resource in the development of school

profiles, and they must be consulted by principals. A school profile includes such items as the school motto, crest, a map showing the physical layout of the school, socio-demographic data on the school community, overall performance levels or test results of students at the school, and information about the school's staff. See also the next topic and the discussion in chapter 4 about school councils' participation in the improvement planning process (vehicle 2).

Preparation of school and board improvement plans

Principals must involve school councils in planning how to improve overall student achievement on provincial and board tests. School councils must also have input into board improvement plans. See also the topic above and the discussion in chapter 4 about school councils' participation in the improvement planning process (vehicle 2).

Preparation of school and board report cards

School councils must be consulted in the preparation of school and board report cards, including but not limited to sections that reflect the participation of parents and the effectiveness of the council itself.

Selection criteria for principals

School councils have a key role to play in developing selection criteria for principals by informing boards of the qualities they seek in a principal, given the needs of their school. Councils must also have input into the development of board policies on principal recruitment and selection.

Performance appraisals of principal, superintendent, and director of education

School council members can offer boards an important perspective on the performance of their principals and board administrators. In most cases, their focus will be on the principal.

School and board budget priorities

School councils must have input into the development of budgets at both the school and board level, particularly with respect to the impact of a budget on the school's and board's improvement plans.

Capital-improvement plans

School councils can help boards identify the needs of their school and community and predict growth, and they can describe the types of facilities needed or preferred.

Naming of schools and other board property

Council members are an important source of information on local dignitaries, role models, and local history and geography, all of which are potential sources of names for schools and other board property. Their knowledge is particularly valuable in view of the large geographic areas covered by district school boards.

School-community communication strategies and Methods of reporting to parents and the community

School councils can offer principals valuable assistance in the development of strategies for communicating with, and methods of reporting to, parents and the community, particularly with respect to the discretionary areas of the provincial report card.

Extracurricular activities in the school

As representatives of parents and the community, school councils must have a voice in determining extracurricular activities and school policies on these activities, including the use of volunteers, timing, and scheduling.

School-based services and community partnerships related to social,**health, recreational, and nutrition programs and Co-ordination of local services for children and youth**

School councils can alert principals and staff to the needs of the school's students. Through their community members and contacts, councils may also be able to facilitate community partnerships and co-ordinate services in these important areas. They can provide both support and direction on initiatives such as child abuse prevention and breakfast programs.

Community use of school facilities

By providing input into school practices and board policies on the community use of schools, council members can help integrate their school into its community.

School closures and the twinning of schools

Because the closing or twinning of schools has a significant impact on school communities, boards must consult school councils before making these important decisions and when revising board policy on this issue.

School boundaries

Boards must consult school councils when adjusting the attendance boundaries of schools, and when developing

or reviewing any policy that affects the attendance rights of students.

Appendix D:

A REVIEW OF POLICY/PROGRAM MEMORANDUM NO. 122

Table 3: Public Comment and EIC Recommendations Respecting PPM 122

Notes: Most of the content of table 3 is covered in the text of this report; some is not. Much of “what EIC suggests” is reflected in specific recommendations.

The purpose of table 3 is: (1) to review PPM 122; (2) to reflect the views we heard during our consultations; and (3) to provide school councils, boards, schools, and staff of the Ministry of Education and Training with suggestions to guide their activities and policies.

PPM 122 includes, as a minimum:	What we heard about it:	What EIC suggests:
<p><i>Membership</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • parents and guardians of students enrolled in school must form majority • community representatives • student representative (secondary school mandatory, elementary school at discretion of principal) • principal • teacher • non-teaching staff member 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • balance is appropriate • parish representative is important to Catholic school councils • difficulty recruiting community members in some areas • need to ensure representation reflects diversity of community (e.g., socio-economic, ethno-cultural, grades/divisions of students, and various towns and neighbourhoods whose children attend the school) • roles of student and staff representatives valued, but need to clarify their roles • need to clarify that elected teaching and non-teaching members limited to one each 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • retain current balance, and clarify that elected teaching and non-teaching members are limited to one each • include Native representative where local band or community warrants • draw community representatives from variety of sources (social service agencies, cultural associations, community groups, businesses, industry, and residents) in keeping with makeup of community • permit use of community representatives on an ad hoc basis • staff and students to participate fully, including voting rights, except where limited by code of conduct • <i>all</i> members to focus on what is best for students in the local school (put into code of conduct) • each school council to implement strategies to encourage participation of all local parents

PPM 122 includes, as a minimum:	What we heard about it:	What EIC suggests:
<p><i>Elections</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • parents elected by parents and guardians of students enrolled in the school • student, teacher, and non-teaching staff elected by respective constituencies • community representatives appointed by council • principal holds designated membership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • general agreement; however... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – many council members elected by acclamation – election procedures (timing, process) vary greatly across province 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • retain current terms and conditions for election and appointment of members • require all school boards to include an election process in their school council policies • hold elections in May or June, with term of office to begin 1 September
<p><i>Term of Office</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one- or two-year terms for elected and appointed positions • members may seek additional terms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • flexibility of current terms is appropriate; if two years were mandatory, many volunteers would be deterred • one-year terms may lead to heavy turnover and lack of continuity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • retain current flexibility • require councils to implement strategies to encourage continuity in membership (e.g., attracting members with younger students, broadening the number of parents involved through subcommittees)
<p><i>Composition</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • parents and guardians form majority (except in adult day schools) • membership to represent diversity of community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • composition is appropriate • importance of broad community representation is appreciated, but a major challenge for many councils • concern about ability of councils in residential schools to include parent and community representatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • retain current composition and share best practices/strategies in recruiting appropriate community representation • provide school councils in hospital and other residential schools with a mechanism for approving the establishment of an alternative model
<p><i>Meetings</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • at least four per year, open to all members of school community • no honorarium for council members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • most councils exceed current minimum number of meetings • many councils have two kinds of meetings: those that are focused on procedural matters, and those that are of public interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • retain current provisions, including having all meetings open to the public

PPM 122 includes, as a minimum:	What we heard about it:	What EIC suggests:
<p><i>Chair</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> parent member, elected by council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> general agreement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> retain current provisions declare employees of board in which council exists to be ineligible for election to chair
<p><i>Roles and responsibilities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> advise principal and, where appropriate, board, on any of the following that the <i>council has identified as priorities</i>: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> local school-year calendar school code of student behaviour curriculum and program goals and priorities responses of school/school board to achievement in provincial and board assessment programs preparation of the school profile selection of principals school budget priorities, including local capital-improvement plans school-community communication strategies methods of reporting to parents and the community extracurricular activities in school school-based services and community partnerships related to social, health, recreational, and nutritional programs community use of school facilities co-ordination of local services for children and youth development, implementation, and review of board policies at the local-school level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> considerable misunderstanding on this matter: some believe the list is too extensive, others that it is too prescriptive or limiting need for clarification of items on list need for accountability measure to ensure principal/board seeks and considers council's advice need for principal/board to report back to council on decisions reached, and why add some mandatory items to the list (e.g., principals/boards must seek council input on school closures, school improvement plans, and school/board policies on school councils) some boards limit the scope of particular provisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> clarify in ministry policy that principal/board <i>must</i> consult on these items and that councils <i>may</i> respond according to their priorities require boards to include accountability measures aimed at ensuring that principals/ boards consult and involve councils and report back on decisions (and provide samples and best practices in school council handbook) add items as set out in table 2 of this report

PPM 122 includes, as a minimum:	What we heard about it:	What EIC suggests:
<p><i>Other roles</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establish goals, priorities, and procedures • organize training and information sessions for members • communicate regularly with school community • report on activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • most councils have established procedures and set annual goals • many require training and exemplary models, especially for setting, monitoring, and assessing annual goals • need for ongoing training for all members was emphasized • many communicate effectively, but communication practices are inconsistent across the province • cost involved in training and communication is a matter of concern • members need assistance and clarification on a timely basis (for example, a "1-800-source" of answers to questions that arise) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase emphasis on fostering parental and community involvement • implement ongoing training, using a "train the trainer" model, across the province • prepare, and distribute to all boards, schools, and council members, a school council handbook and support materials, including exemplary practices • establish a network of contacts, both at the provincial level and in the ministry's district offices, to quickly provide council members with information and clarification
<p><i>Reporting</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • directors of education to include report on the establishment and operation of school councils in their annual reports to the minister • school boards to develop procedures for evaluating the implementation of their policies on school councils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • little awareness of these provisions • process must be in place in each school and school board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reflect activities of councils in school and board report cards and improvement plans

PPM 122 includes, as a minimum:	What we heard about it:	What EIC suggests:
<p><i>Relations between councils</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> boards to facilitate communications among their councils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> communication among councils varies across the province, with many exemplary practices reported and many concerns expressed board-wide councils (usually composed of chairs from individual councils) exist in about half of all boards, and their activities range from training and communication to acting as board-wide advisory bodies to the school board community associations of councils exist in some areas to co-ordinate council activities and provide a forum for discussion and training board leadership in this area varies many councils prefer to focus only on their local school, except for training sessions concern was expressed that board-wide and province-wide councils would duplicate some of the work of boards and the ministry, and create another bureaucracy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> hold board-wide/area/regional forums for the purpose of training and sharing best practices, to be planned by school councils with support from school and board administrators permit board-wide associations of councils where councils want them include best practices in this area in school council handbook restructure OPC to represent school councils at the provincial level; to be composed of parents elected from school councils; to be consulted by ministry and other provincial education agencies on matters related to school council responsibilities)

Appendix E:

EIC'S RESEARCH AND CONSULTATION PROCESS

Note: The following describes the Commission's formal research and consultation process. Since the Commission was established in April 1997, we have had continuous input from parents and other members of the public on the subject of school councils—during discussion periods following our speaking engagements, and in letters, e-mail messages, and phone calls.

January – April 1998

Conducted preliminary research

- advisory committee composed of parents, trustees, and principals, provided input into the development of our research and consultation process

May 1998

Released public discussion paper

- invited public to send individual responses
- invited local groups to organize public discussions and send in collective responses (Commissioners and staff were invited to attend approximately 50 of these public discussions.)

May – October 1998

Conducted research

- reviewed academic literature and models in other jurisdictions
- surveyed district, school boards on school councils operations
- analysed public responses as they came in

September 1998

Met with provincial stakeholder groups

- parent groups
- trustees
- teachers' federations
- other school staff unions
- students
- associations representing supervisory officers and principals

September – October 1998

Met with reference group on barriers to participation on school councils

- identified problems
- identified solutions

September – October 1998

Held 93 consultation sessions in 22 locations across the province

- held focus-group meetings with members of the local education community during the afternoons

- held open “town hall” meetings during the evenings

Communities visited:

- | | |
|----------------|--------------------|
| - Windsor | - Kingston |
| - London | - Cornwall |
| - Fort Erie | - Ottawa |
| - Burlington | - North Bay |
| - Kitchener | - Sudbury |
| - Barrie | - Sault Ste. Marie |
| - Brampton | - Timmins |
| - Owen Sound | - Hearst |
| - Toronto (4) | - Thunder Bay |
| - Oshawa | - Dryden |
| - Peterborough | - Fort Frances |

October – November 1998

Completed analysis and wrote report

November 1998

Released report

Appendix F:

LIST OF SUBMISSIONS

*l'Association des enseignantes et
enseignants franco-ontariens*
*l'Association franco-ontarienne des
conseils scolaires catholiques*
 Canadian Union of Public Employees
 Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario
 Council for Exceptional Children
 Council of Ontario Directors of
 Education
 Elementary Teachers' Federation of
 Ontario
*la Fédération des associations de parents
francophones de l'Ontario*
*la Fédération des étudiants du secondaire
francophones de l'Ontario*
 Greek Central Education Liaison
 Committee
 Learning Disabilities Association of
 Ontario
 Minister's Advisory Council on Special
 Education
 Ontario Association of Parents in
 Catholic Education
 Ontario Association of School Business
 Officials (meeting; no submission
 received)
 Ontario Catholic School Trustees'
 Association

Ontario Catholic Supervisory Officers'
 Association
 Ontario Coalition for Education Reform
 Ontario Education Alliance
 Ontario English Catholic Teachers'
 Association
 Ontario Federation of Home and
 School Associations
 Ontario Federation of Labour
 Ontario Parent Council
 Ontario Principals' Council
 Ontario Public School Boards'
 Association
 Ontario Public Supervisory Officials'
 Association
 Ontario School Council Initiative
 Ontario Secondary School Teachers'
 Federation
 Ontario Teachers' Federation
 Organization for Quality Education
 Organization of Parents of Black Children
 People for Education
 Somali-Canadian Parents' Council of
 Toronto

The Commission also received
 written submissions from:
 Individual parents, community
 members, students, and school
 and board staff
 District school boards

Reference group on barriers to
 participation in school councils
 (summary of meetings)
 Regional and local employee groups
 Regional school councils
 School councils

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1. Leithwood, Kenneth, Doris Jantzi, and Rosanne Steinbach, "Do School Councils Matter?" 34.
2. Leithwood, Kenneth, and Teresa Menzies, *Forms and Effects of School-Based Management: A Review*, 24–25.
3. Ross, Peter N., "Parents Make the Difference," *Education Today* (September–October 1994), 19–22.
4. Ontario Teachers' Federation, letter to Dave Cooke and Ann Vanstone, co-chairs, Education Improvement Commission, 15 October 1998.
5. Edmonds, R.R., and J.R. Fredericksen, "Search for Effective Schools: The Identification and Analysis of City Schools That Are Instructionally Effective for Poor Children," ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 470 396, cited in Hess, G. Alfred, Jr., *School Restructuring, Chicago Style*, 116.

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NOTES

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